

MECHANICAL MEMORIES MAGAZINE

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*The only UK magazine for collectors and enthusiasts of
vintage coin-operated amusement machines*

Mechanical Memories Magazine

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Editorial

Hello, and a very happy New Year to you all. As you can see, once again the 'must get the magazine out on time' New Year's resolution didn't get very far. Actually, the only resolution I made this year was 'don't make resolutions you can't keep'.....So far, it's working quite well.

As you will all know, the campaign to reopen Margate's Dreamland as a heritage park is a subject very close to my heart, and it is now over two years ago that I asked Nick Laister, chairman of the Dreamland Trust, to write a monthly report for this magazine. It was hoped that Dreamland would reopen this year; in fact, I recall there was at one time a small chance that it might have opened last year. Unfortunately, negotiations with the landowners were getting nowhere, as a result of which, Thanet District Council were forced to serve a compulsory purchase order on the owners last year. The CPO inquiry is being held as I write this, and Nick will of course be in attendance throughout.

Due to the inquiry, Nick has been unable to write his report this month, so I took it upon myself to write of few lines instead. However, it seems I got a bit carried away and my few lines turned into four pages! So apologies to those readers who have no interest in Dreamland, although I do hope they will be very few.

And finally, it's been some time since we've had a caption competition. I've printed one of my saucy seaside postcards on the front cover, with the caption omitted (it's in colour by the way – did you notice)? So think of a caption, (you can have as many goes as you like) and get them back to me either by post or email. I'm hoping the February issue won't be as late as this, so please them back ASAP. As usual, the winner gets a free year's subscription.

Well that's it for now

All the best

Jerry

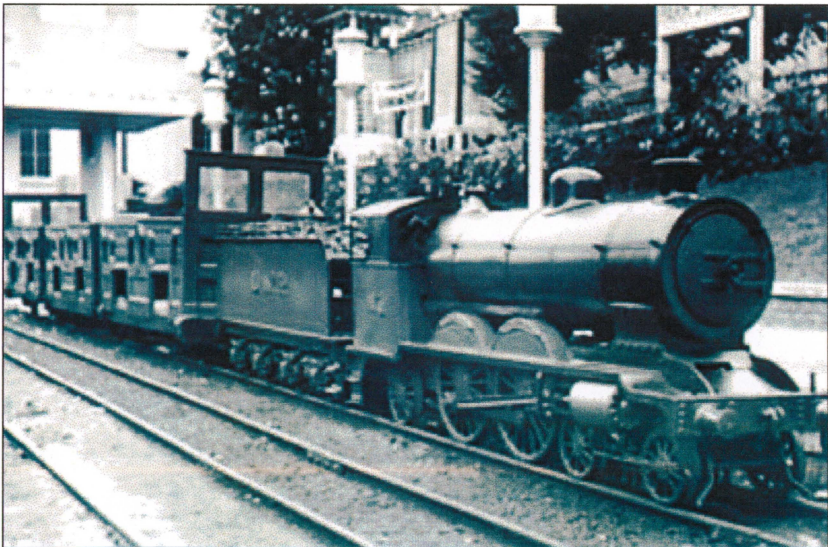
Dreamland Memories

By Jerry Chattenton

Isn't it funny, how as we get older we can't remember what happened half an hour ago, and yet we can remember with crystal clarity and infinite detail events of our childhood, when perhaps half a century or more has since passed. In my case, it's probably just as well, because these days I have seldom ever done anything interesting half an hour ago, and yet I do have some wonderful memories from my childhood.

Among my fondest memories are trips to the seaside, none more than my first ever trip to Margate. I guess it would have been in the early to mid 1960s, and having already been told about Dreamland by my parents, my expectations and excitement were understandably high. We arrived mid morning, allowing plenty of time for sandcastle building, followed by lunch on the beach. It was then off to Dreamland, and an afternoon of sheer delight.

The entrance to Dreamland was at the bottom of a short sloping road, running between the cinema and the Coxswains pub. As you walked through the main building, you passed various rock stalls, the café and Galleon bar on the corner. Then, as you emerged into daylight, you would be greeted by the sound of scenic railway trains thundering overhead. This was a truly magical experience for a small boy, which seemed never ending on that first visit.



One of my most vivid memories of that first visit was a ride on the juvenile autodrome, in my very own car. Although only a juvenile ride, it seemed so big to a mere child. I'm sure I would also have had a ride on the Peter Pan railway. Even at that young age, I was already familiar with these rides as they were to be found on the beach at many seaside resorts. And then there was a ride for the whole family on the Dreamland miniature railway. The trains were hauled by a real steam locomotive in miniature, along a straight track that seemed to never end, through a tunnel lit with coloured lights and back into daylight again. Towards the end of the track, there was a small miniature fairground with swing boats and stalls, and occupied by gnomes (I recall the gnomes were bigger than the swing boats)! The train would then reverse back to the station, ready to collect its next consignment of passengers.

My parents took my sister and me for a ride in the river caves, which was like wonderland. The Dreamland caves may have been unique; I've certainly never heard of anything similar. Many amusement parks had river caves, but it was just a boring ride in a boat (OK, it may not have been boring, but nonetheless, still a ride in a boat). However, the Dreamland caves were different. Passengers sat in a large tub, which was then transported up a long inclined conveyor. When the tub reached the top, you then came splashing down into the waterway and then off on your magical journey through the caves. As the tubs brushed the sides of the narrow waterway, they would gently spin. What a wonderful family attraction.



*Above, Brooklands Speedway, Gallopers and Octopus, c. mid 1950s
Left, one of Dreamland's miniature railway locomotives c.1930s*

I would have been too young to sample many of the bigger rides, but I do remember them so well. Rides such as the octopus, gallopers and big wheel I had already seen at the fair, but there were so many others that were completely new to me. I remember my fascination with the jets and the sound of compressed air being expelled as they were raised and lowered by their riders. The caterpillar and whip would soon become firm favourites in just a year or two, but the scenic railway would have to wait until I was quite a bit older.

Although I wouldn't have known it at the time, many of the rides and attractions were quite elderly. Whilst rides such as the jets and paratrooper were relatively modern, others were considerably older. The scenic railway was in its fifth decade, the caterpillar too, and the whip wasn't too far behind. And yet, it didn't matter. It was a fun place for families, with fun rides for everyone. That's how amusement parks were, and it's how they should be now. Hopefully Dreamland will be once again, soon.

Dreamland wasn't just for kids – there was plenty of fun to be had for big kids too! In later years, I remember a glorious summer's day in the late 1970s, when a friend and I spent our lunch hour in the pub with two of the girls that worked in the office. After a couple of pints we realised we were going to be late back, so we had another. We then decided that no one was going to thank us for getting back late, so after another pint, we all jumped on a train to Margate. When we arrived, we had another quick pint or two, and then into Dreamland, where I recall we spent some considerable time on the scenic railway. In those days, having paid full fare and done the full circuit, you could then pay half fare and go round again. We spent a brilliant afternoon in Dreamland, and we didn't even get the sack the following day!

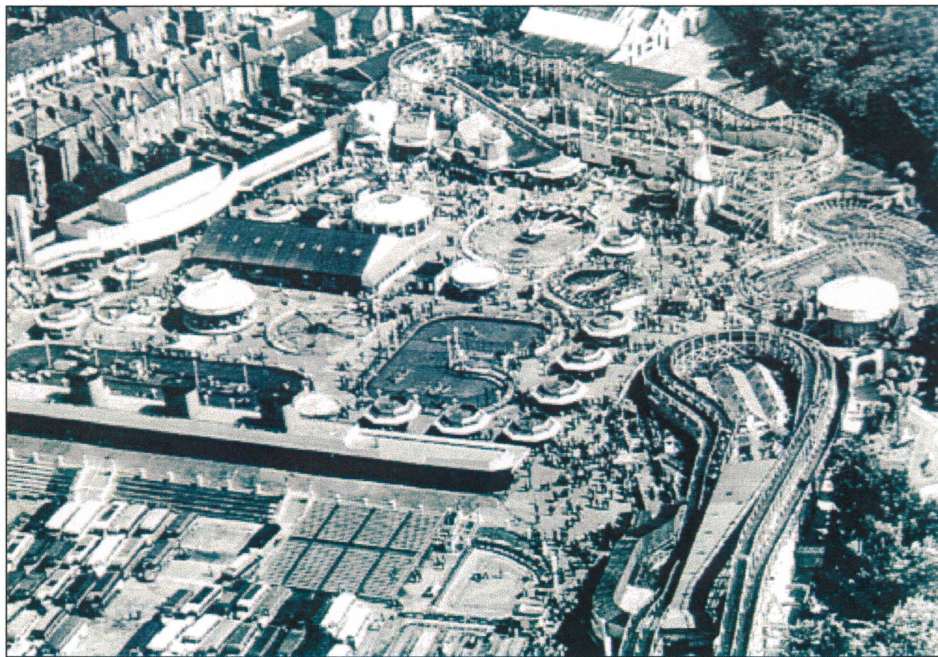
However, my memories of Margate and Dreamland are not all pleasant. In 1991, Sharron and I had not long been together, and I hadn't yet met her parents (I don't know who she was more ashamed of – me or them). Anyway, Sharron and I drove down to Margate with a friend, having arranged to meet the future in-laws there. Well, things started off OK, with the five of us spending most of the afternoon in the pub. Having ascertained that the parents were nice people, were not in the least antagonistic towards me for stealing away their daughter and were probably quite glad to see the back of her, we then ventured on to Dreamland. Having consumed seven or eight pints, I was hungry and needed something to eat. The others wandered off somewhere whilst I eagerly tucked into some rather disgusting chicken and chips.

Dreamland was no longer the Dreamland I remembered so fondly. In the early eighties it had been taken over by the Dutch Bombom brothers, who had completely ruined the place by turning it into a white-knuckle theme park, pandering to the lowest common denominator: youngsters, with their bottomless stash of disposable income. They even ditched the name Dreamland and renamed the park 'Bombom Brothers' (so much for imagination). Gone were the gentle river caves, the jets and the caterpillar, to be replaced by hideous stomach-churning contraptions, which were of no interest to me. The most terrifying of these was the looping star, a steel roller coaster that twisted and turned its riders, and subjected them to a 360 degree loop.

Anyway, back to our day out. Having finished my chicken and chips, I met up with the others..... and that's when things started to go wrong. My future wife, either out of pure malice or perhaps just for sheer amusement, made me go on that bloody loop the loop thing. Now, I don't know whether it was the eight pints of beer or the chicken and chips, but for some reason I didn't enjoy the ride. As we hurtled round the loop, I shouted obscenities as loudly as I could, and yet no sound came out. If my brain didn't know what was happening, my stomach certainly did. When we eventually got off, I was as green as grass; I couldn't see it, but I could certainly feel it.

So when Dreamland does reopen (and we all hope that it will), please please please, no looping star.

Jerry



An aerial view of Dreamland in its heyday, c. early 1950s

Dreamland Remembered: 90th Anniversary Edition

by Nick Evans

Margate's Dreamland park opened in July 1920 and millions flocked to enjoy its attractions in the decades that followed. A visit to the Kent coast resort wasn't complete without a ride on the famed Scenic Railway, the Looping Star, the Big Wheel or the dodgem cars.

Dreamland's trendsetting 1930s cinema led the way in design while the ballroom became famous for dancing and big name music concerts. Its restaurants fed the hordes descending on Margate for their beanfeast outings. Later on, it would hold its own as an exciting theme park.

The resort's decline in recent years has taken its toll, leaving many yearning for a return to simpler times when candy floss and kiss me quick hats were the order of the day.

This edition of Dreamland Remembered, updated and expanded to celebrate the park's 90th anniversary, contains a nostalgic collection of nearly 250 illustrations from its earliest days to the latest ideas to create a heritage theme park.

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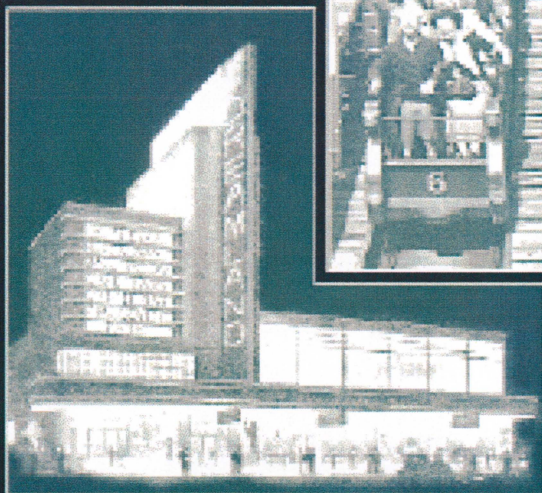
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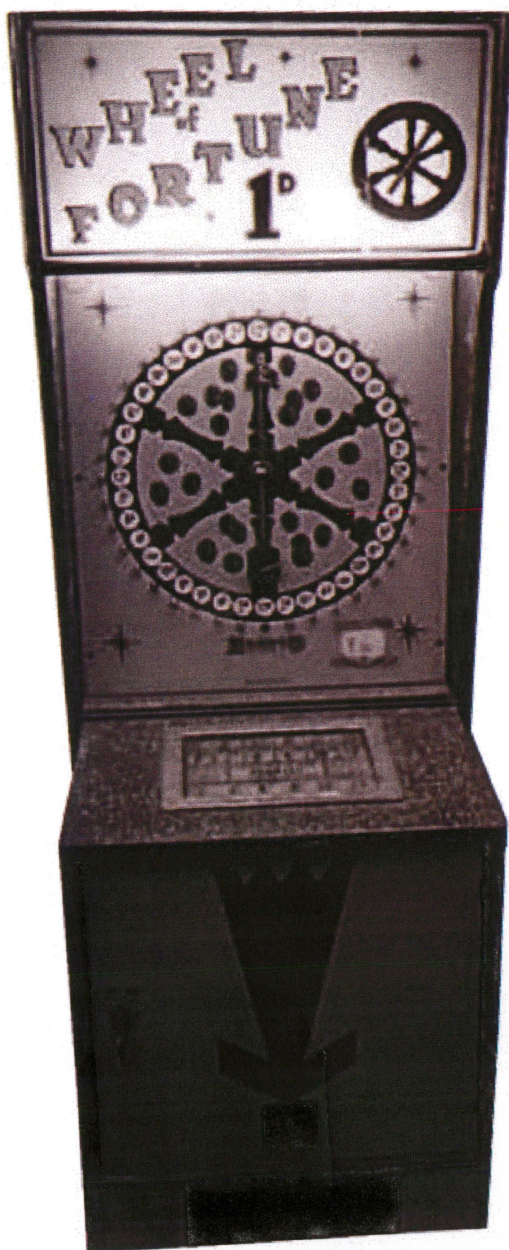
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Celebrating Margate's famous amusement park
by NICK EVANS

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Brenco Wheel of Fortune

By Robert Rowland

My article this month will take a closer look at what was probably my favourite slot machine back in the 1960s, the Brenco **Wheel of Fortune**. The machine stood just under seven feet tall and was two feet wide. It had a large round clock type face, with a spinning arrow that in theory could stop on any of the forty positions. The machine was in constant attract mode, meaning the arrow kept turning all day. When '*play now*' lit, you could insert up to six pennies per game, placing your bet to win 2d, 4d, 6d, 8d, 10, or 12d. Then '*don't play*' would light up and the silver arrow stopped. If the arrow stopped on a number you had bet on, then that's the amount of pennies you would win. Of course, if one of the four '*lost*' symbols came up, you won nothing.

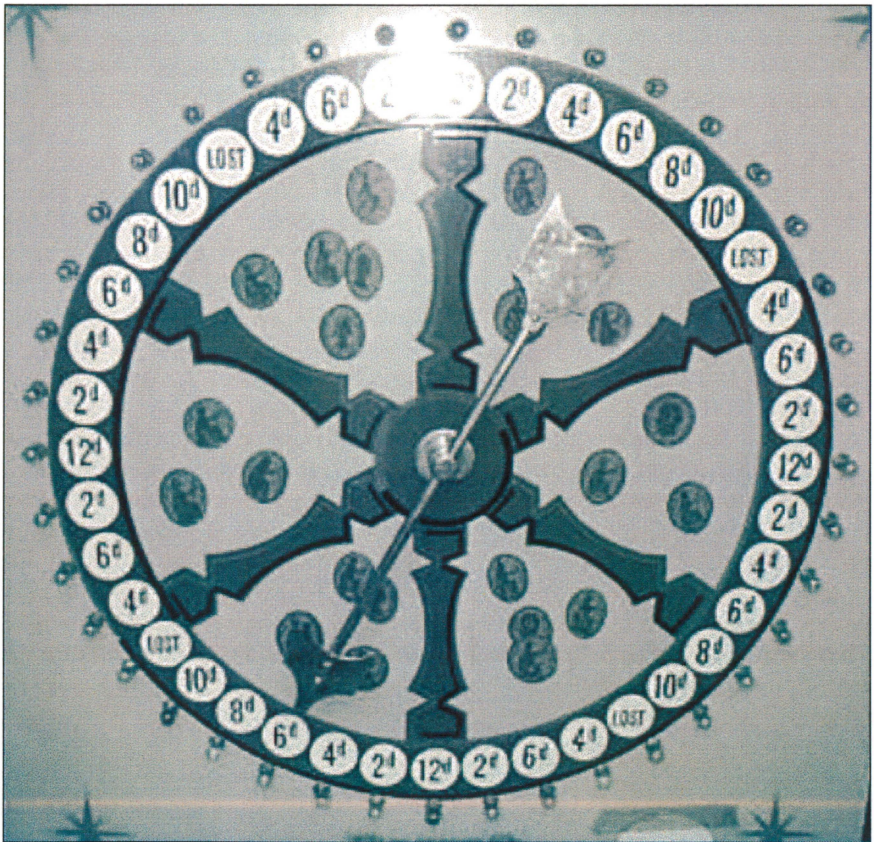
I noticed back in the summer of 1965 that a local older lad called Ken was always hanging around the Wheel of Fortune in Marine Pastimes. This Wheel was situated in a tiny alcove to the left at the entrance to the arcade. One day Ken let me into his little secret. He had in his hand a six-inch strip of thin Formica, which he pushed down into one of the coin slots. As '*play now*' lit, he would lower this strip down until the bet placed to win lit up. I noticed he seemed to favour the 6d bet, and I heard it click out winnings quite a few times. He was very uneasy, as there were three attendants on patrol in Marine at that time. Once he even paid me sixpence to keep a lookout for any approaching attendants. I think he eventually made the mistake of emptying the machine on too many occasions, because a few weeks later that Wheel of Fortune in Marine was moved to the centre of the arcade, in full view of the attendants and I never saw Ken on that machine again.

I often saw holidaymakers watching the Wheel of Fortune with pen and paper in hand, writing down the results of each spin, hoping to find a winning sequence. Alas, I knew that this would never happen for them, as that particular method didn't work on this machine. However, there was a sort of system, as a friend and I discovered. After watching the machine for a while, we noticed that a maximum full cycle of each play was six seconds. We worked out that we could predict an area where the silver arrow would stop. This area was a spread of about five positions, so on most occasions we would bet more than one coin. If we thought the arrow would end up around the '10 past' area on the clock face, then we would bet on the 6d, 8d and 10d (we always bet on the higher amounts).

Not every number on the clock face could come up. Counting the top twelve as position 1, we learnt by constant watching over a period of time that positions 9 (6d), 11 (12d), 19 (6d), 26 (10d), 31 (12d), 35 (8d), 36 (10d) and 39 (6d) never came up. In

later years, my own Wheel of Fortune confirms this. Inside the machine is a wheel with steel pins fitted around its circumference. These pins can be easily removed, so when the plastic brake kicks in to stop the arrow, a missing pin will simply slide the brake onto the next available pin (I suppose four tens and twelves would have made the machine too generous).

If the arrow started instantly, (that's what we called a fast spin) the outcome would be that the arrow would finish two or three positions short of the previous result. However, when there was a pause when 'play now' lit, the spin time of the arrow was vastly reduced. The result was that we could successfully predict an area where the arrow would stop. This became very profitable, the only problem being that it really was pure chance when the bob (12d) would win. This meant us loitering around the Wheel of Fortune for that chance, even then the arrow could end up landing on one of the two 2d wins either side of the top twelve.



All this loitering got us noticed by the attendants, as the machine (thanks to Ken) was now in full view to them. A couple of bob wins clicking out in fairly quick succession soon had one of the attendants heading our way, resulting in the machine being switched off or us being moved on. Not that we were doing anything wrong, we were just simply winning.

Some arcades had Wheel of Fortunes situated in better positions (for us). The one at the Empire was ideal, just to the right of the side entrance near the exit, well out of sight. However, despite this, as young kids we were far too scared to risk the Formica strip cheat. We relied on our own safer winning system, which was profitable but on many occasions an attendant would pop his head round the corner and a raised finger and "out" sent us on our way. Eventually, this particular Wheel of Fortune ended up being moved right next to the cashdesk on the back wall and the workshop the other side.

Robert Rowland

The Brenco Wheel of Fortune story continues next month.



Editor's note: There is a website dedicated to the many machines produced by Brenco: www.fruitmachinemuseum.co.uk

Clever Mr Mocogni

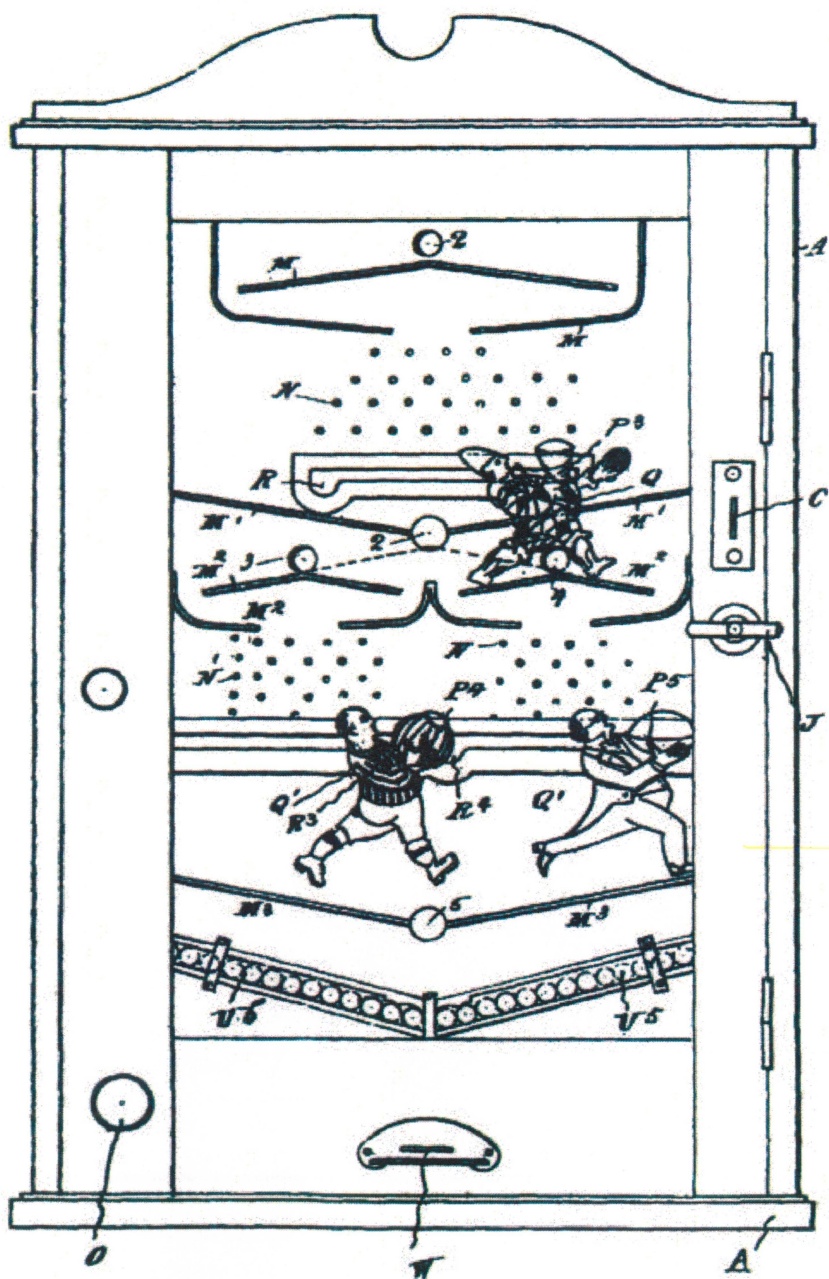
By Jerry Chattenton

During the early years of my vintage coin-op collecting, it was a constant and seemingly never ending joy to discover a new machine; a wondrous mechanical amusement that I had hitherto not encountered. Those discoveries are so familiar to me now, and have been for many years, but at the time they were a revelation. I can still recall the excitement when Sharron and I visited Paignton pier whilst on holiday in the West Country. Amongst a number of vintage machines situated on the pier, I saw for the first time a Bryans Gapwin and a Bussoz Pin-up Girl. "I've got to get one of these" I exclaimed (twice) – words that would be repeated on many occasions. (Don't all go rushing down to Devon; it was a long time ago, and the machines are long gone).

The wall machine that perhaps stimulated my interest more than any other in those early days of collecting was the *catcher*. I soon learned that they come in many shapes and sizes, in varying complexities and were produced, in one form or another, throughout the twentieth century (even today, there are modern redemption machines that are basically catchers). From the Bryans Payramid, the pinnacle of all catchers, to the compact American Kicker and Catcher machines or the original British Pickwicks, I loved them all. However, it has always been one of the earliest machines of the genre that I have found to be the most endearing: the *Clown Catcher*.

The German 'Clown' was a remarkable metamorphosis from the large, clumsy British long-case machines from just a few years earlier. Small and compact, with an aesthetically pleasing playfield and automatic payout, the really appealing element of the machine was the catching medium, in the form of a harlequin clown figure scooting along on his little ball. These machines were produced in large numbers for three decades, in both Germany and this country, but their basic design never really changed.

In more recent years, having almost exhausted the supply of 'new machines' to discover, I now take a keen interest in original patents for machines that probably never actually materialised or were produced in such small numbers that they will have been permanently lost in obscurity. I have recently discovered a patent that I find most intriguing, and from which a number of questions arise that I find puzzling. It was submitted on 12th June 1915 by a Mr Giovanni Mocogni, described as a confectioner, of The Cross, Hurlford, Ayrshire and was accepted on 23rd March 1916. As can be seen from one of the patent drawings opposite, it is what one might call a 'double chance' Clown Catcher. With three catching cups, if the player fails to catch the ball on his first attempt, the ball will then drop further down the playfield giving the player another chance of catching the ball in one of two more cups.



The obvious question that arises, of course, is do any exist? I've never seen one or even a picture of one, nor have I heard of anything like it. If one were to turn up, that surely would be a discovery. However, having read through the patent and studied the drawings, I found myself asking further questions; in particular, why was it patented, and more importantly, why was it approved? It is certainly not clear exactly what claim Mr Mocogni was making.

The concept of an amusement machine in which the player was required to catch a ball in a moveable cup had been patented by Henry Pessers in 1900. The Clown Catcher was never actually patented, but was produced under licence to Pessers patent. Reading through Mr Mocogni's patent, he takes four pages of text to describe in great detail what is essentially the mechanism for the original German Clown. I obviously cannot print the entire patent here, but you will see from the drawing opposite that, with the exception of a few additional links to operate the two extra catching cups, it is indeed a Clown mechanism.

So perhaps the claim was purely for the provision of two extra catching cups? Well, that had already been done before, which Mr Mocogni admits in his text:

"I am of course aware that it has previously been proposed to provide an apparatus for playing a game of skill having upper and lower cups moveable at will along a definite path and under the control of the operator so as to afford more than one opportunity of catching the ball and winning a prize, and with obstructionable pins on face of machine."

As it would appear that nothing new was being claimed, why was the patent approved? I can only surmise that the men were all at war and the girl at the patent office just rubber-stamped it! Given that the German Clown was never patented, it would appear that Mr Mocogni was essentially the proud owner of a patent for a machine that had first been produced in a foreign land a decade earlier. Clever.

The full patent can be viewed in the Archive on the pennymachines site.

Jerry

P.S. I never did get a Gapwin. However, I do know a man who has three. I've tried to convince him that he doesn't actually need three, so far to no avail..... but I'm working on it.

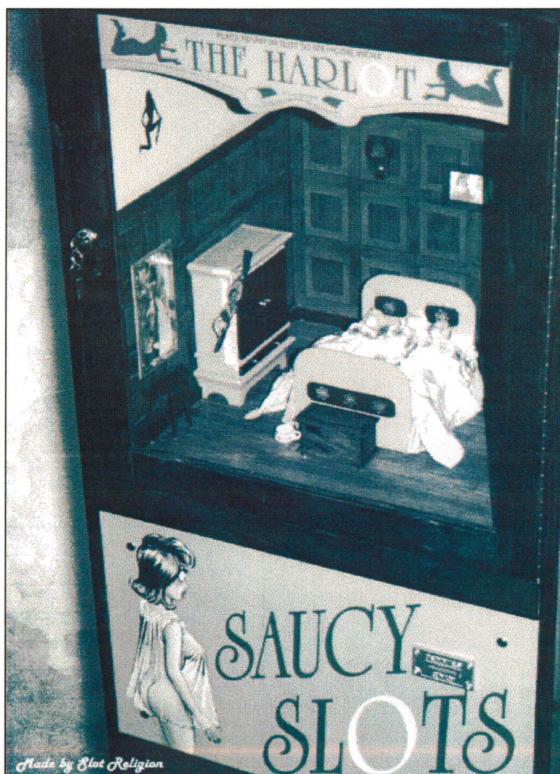


Something Different

By Terry Selby

Having designed, made and finished my automaton 'The Undertaker's Parlour' I decided that the next one I made had to be totally different and original. I needed to do something that nobody else had done – easily said! After much thought, I just couldn't come up with any ideas, so I left it. Until.....

I called in unexpectedly on a friend one day, who was working on her website, cataloguing and advertising old postcards. Amongst them I noticed many of the old saucy seaside postcards that would always give you a chuckle. It was then that I thought, "why not have some saucy automatons?" And so SAUCY SLOTS was born.



The mechanical side of the machine was not too much of a problem, but I could see different ways I could make improvements on my original movements, although there was nothing wrong with the original ones. Then there were the little comical characters that would have to be made. Again, not too much of a problem, as I have gained much experience and pleasure over the years in making quite large numbers of them for different projects. They are time consuming, as you have to create charm, amusement and expression in order to bring them to life. The cabinet I could make, putting nearly forgotten woodworking skills back into action (as far as the arthritis will allow. Blimey! It makes you feel old)!

Now I had to call in the professionals. I refer to the electricians who talk in a language that is best known to them. Words like relays, resistors, power controls etc. that leave me in a total fog. Each to their own I say. The next professional services required are the lads who design and produce the artwork and graphics needed for the cabinet. Fortunately, I know of one of these talented wizards who's skills never disappoint.

Finally, after over a year's hard work, the first Saucy Slots with the theme titled 'The Harlot' is at present standing in my hall amusing visitors. I should perhaps describe to you the enacting scene upon insertion of one old penny:

The scene is a bedroom. There is a large bed which is occupied by to gentlemen client with a blonde lady of a dubious profession lying between them. Each one sits up in turn, with the lady revealing her ample charms. As she does so, a picture on the wall changes to a sign that says NEXT! A door opens in the corner, and standing there naked, covering his modesty, awaiting his turn stands.....Ha Ha! I'm not telling you who (to be revealed at a later date).

Terry Selby
Slot Religion





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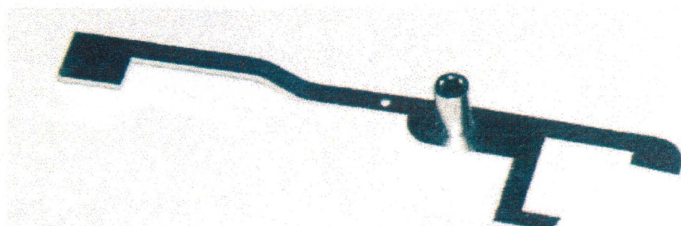
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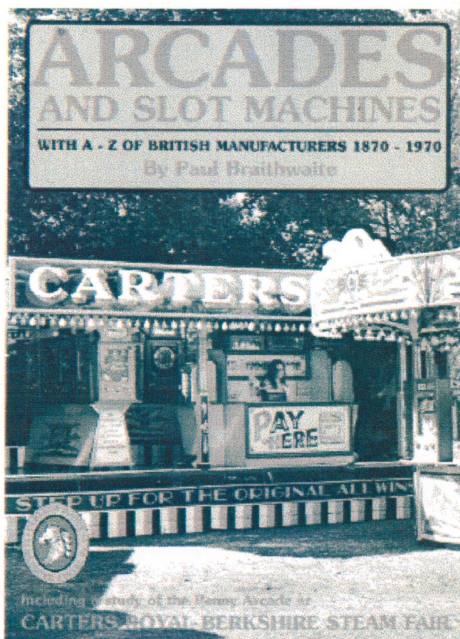
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